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Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable TOM UDALL, a Senator from the State of New Mexico.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Eternal God, we have depended on our own strength long enough. Though we talk of Your greatness and might, we too often seek to tackle life's challenges and problems by leaning completely upon our limited power and understanding.

Remind us that every good and perfect gift comes from You and that we have no strength apart from You. In a world where evil seems so rampant, inspire our lawmakers to lead pure and unselfish lives that are worthy of Your name.

Lord, use them to create goodwill that will challenge the best in people and will usher in the reign of Your abiding peace. Draw them together in oneness in diversity, unity in patriotism, and loyalty in a shared commitment to You.

We pray in Your wonderful Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable TOM UDALL led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

APPOINTMENT OF ACTING PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will please read a communication to the Senate from the President pro tempore (Mr. BYRD).

The legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, September 30, 2009.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable TOM UDALL, a Senator from the State of New Mexico, to perform the duties of the Chair.

ROBERT C. BYRD,
President pro tempore.

Mr. UDALL of New Mexico thereupon assumed the chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

CHANGES IN THE SENATE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I was thinking this morning after the prayer and pledge how things in the Senate, because of tradition, rarely change. But one of the things that has changed during the time I have been in the Senate is the Pledge of Allegiance. That wasn't done before. I don't know how many years ago the pledge was started, and it doesn't matter who the leader of the Senate is, it is something I think will be with us forever in the Senate. I think it is a good tradition we picked up.

As I recall—my friend is on the Senate floor, the Republican leader—this was started during—was it Senator Frist or Dole? When was that, do you recall? It was one of the Republican leaders.

Mr. MCCONNELL. If the majority leader will yield, I think it was 8 or 10 years ago. Interestingly enough, I believe who first suggested it was former Senator Bob Smith of New Hampshire, and it was widely recognized on both sides of the aisle that this is something we should have been doing for a long time.

Mr. REID. When I was president of the senate in Nevada, that was something we always did. Of course, I remember Bob Smith. I think it was a Republican leader, but, regardless, it is something that is a part of the tradition now, and I am glad we are doing it.

SCHEDULE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, following leader remarks, the Senate will be in morning business for 1 hour; Republicans will control the first 30 minutes and the majority will control the next 30 minutes. Following that morning business, the Senate will proceed to the consideration of the conference report to accompany H.R. 2918, the Legislative Branch appropriations bill and the continuing resolution, with the time until 4:30 equally divided and controlled between Senators NELSON of Nebraska and MURKOWSKI. Senators should expect a series of three rollcall votes. We hope there could even be more than that, to begin about 4:30 this afternoon.

The Senate will recess from 12:30 until 2:15 to allow for our weekly caucus luncheons.

I am sure Republican luncheons are packed with a lot of discussion. I know I had a meeting earlier this morning with a number of Senators, and we have a lot to talk about. We have the health care bill. We have to talk about energy, which is something we need to do. Regulation reform, we are going to talk about that at our caucus. And we are going to spend a little bit of time on Afghanistan.

That brings us to the point that this afternoon there is going to be a Members-only, classified briefing at 5:30 with GEN Jim Jones, the National Security Adviser to the President. The issue of dealing with Afghanistan has heated up. That is going to be there—perhaps on this bill that is before us, if not shortly thereafter—as to what we are going to do on Afghanistan.

● This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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Briefly, on health care, the committee is making progress. I am happy about that. I would say that under the Republicans' plan, insurance companies can deny coverage for a pre-existing condition, because you are getting older or because you are a woman. Under their plan, insurance companies can take away your coverage when you need it the most.

Under our plan, if you like what you have, you can keep it; but if you don't, there will be affordable choices for you that cannot be taken away. We will protect Medicare, will not raise taxes on the middle class, and we are not going to add any money to the deficit.

Mr. President, I have been reminded to announce to the Senate—I talked to the Republican leader about this last week—Columbus Day is fast approaching. It is the week after next. With all the things going on here, it would not be right for us to take that week off.

What we are going to do, as I have explained to the Republican leader last week, we will be off that Monday—which is the holiday, Columbus Day—and the following Friday. To make it as convenient as we can for everyone, on Tuesday we will be in session and have a vote late that afternoon. I know that is inconvenient for others because we had indicated there would be that recess.

It is a long period of time, as I have announced on the Senate floor, 11 weeks from the time we started this work period until Thanksgiving. That is a long time when a number of us have families at home, and the work we want to try to do during the week rather than just on weekends. So I apologize to everyone.

Mr. MCCONNELL. If the majority leader will yield, which Tuesday was the leader referring to?

Mr. REID. Tuesday after Columbus Day. It is October 13.

Mr. MCCONNELL. We will be in. There would be a vote at what point on that Tuesday?

Mr. REID. We will vote at 5, 5:30. OK?

As I have indicated, I apologize to everyone for not being able to have that whole week off, but I think with health care, which is beginning to firm up, it would not be right for us to be gone that week. I think we should be able to start our health care work that week in the Senate.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader is recognized.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Let me reiterate further for the Members on this side of the aisle, what the leader indicated is, the week that includes Columbus Day, which is on a Monday, we will have Monday and Friday of that week off, and he has indicated the first vote will be on the Tuesday after Columbus Day, late in the afternoon.

MCCHRYSAL PLAN

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, the situation in Afghanistan is urgent, and

we are told that action is necessary soon. But to better understand the need for action, the American people need to know all the details. And they should have those details explained to them by the man who knows them best.

It is hard to deny the urgency of General McChrystal's assessment, parts of which have already been made public. And it is impossible to ignore his depiction of a grave and deteriorating situation in the same part of the world where a group of terrorists plotted the 9/11 attacks. General McChrystal's assessment of Afghanistan should worry all of us. As the President told a Turkish audience in April, "The world has come too far to let this region backslide, and to let al Qaeda terrorists plot further attacks."

Earlier this year, President Obama expressed his confidence in General McChrystal by appointing him to his current post. Following the President's lead, the Senate expressed its confidence in General McChrystal by confirming him for his current mission without dissent. Now it is time for Congress to hear his detailed assessment of the mission that we confirmed him for, and to give him an opportunity to explain why he has concluded that additional troops are needed to avert failure.

HEALTH CARE WEEK XI, DAY I

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, Senators will continue to hash out a health care bill in committee today, and anyone who tunes in will hear a dizzying amount of detail about what is in and what is out.

But it is worth noting that the basic shape of this legislation is already clear: Any bill that makes it to the Senate floor will include a heavy dose of tax hikes. Any bill that makes it to the floor will include massive cuts to Medicare. Any bill that makes it to the floor of the Senate will be about 1,000 pages long, cost about a trillion dollars, affect about one-sixth of the entire U.S. economy, and impact the health care of every single American, whether they like it or not.

And here is the other thing we know: Democrats don't want to give the American people the time they need to review all the details. We saw this last week when they rejected a request for a simple 72-hour review, which is hard for anyone who grasps the scope of this legislation to understand. Nor would they pledge to wait until we understand the full cost of this bill, before acting on it.

There is important work going on in the Finance Committee this week, but no one should lose sight of where the work is headed. What we know for sure is higher taxes when American families and businesses are struggling just to make ends meet, cuts to seniors' Medicare when the program is already going bankrupt, more spending and more debt when we are about to end the fis-

cal year just today with an annual deficit roughly equivalent to the deficits of the last 5 years combined—the deficit this fiscal year, ending today, will be roughly as much as the last 5 years combined—and a government intrusion into health care of every single American at a time when Americans are asking us to lower costs and lower premiums, not add new burdens to the system or wreck the care they already have and like.

We know the essentials of the health care bill already. Americans have every reason to be concerned.

I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to a period of morning business for 1 hour, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each, with the time equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees, with the Republicans controlling the first half and the majority controlling the final half.

The Senator from Tennessee is recognized.

HEALTH CARE REFORM

Mr. ALEXANDER. I wonder, before the Republican leader leaves, if I could ask him a quick question? I ask unanimous consent that Senators BARRASSO, MCCAIN, and BENNETT, and the Republican leader, be permitted to engage in a colloquy during our 30 minutes and that I be notified when we have about 4 minutes left.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. ALEXANDER. I ask the Senator from Kentucky, the Republican leader, is it not true that the Finance Committee Democrats voted down a Republican proposal to put the health care reform bill on the Internet for 72 hours so Americans could read it?

Mr. MCCONNELL. I would say to my friend from Tennessee that is absolutely correct.

Mr. ALEXANDER. I believe the Republican leader said the bill might be 2,000 pages long?

Mr. MCCONNELL. Certainly, well above 1,000 and probably 2,000.

Mr. ALEXANDER. If I am not mistaken, there are several versions of the bill in the House of Representatives that will come over here. Then there is a version that we did in the Health Committee here that will have to be integrated with that bill; is that not correct?

Mr. MCCONNELL. It is my understanding it is the intention of the majority leader and the administration to